

5-11-1902

Letter from Vida Dutton Scudder, Florence, Italy, to Anne Whitney, Boston, Massachusetts, 1902 May 11

Vida Dutton Scudder

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Miss Anne Whitney,

The Charlesgate,

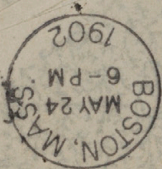
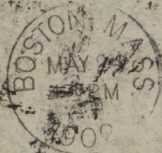
Back Bay,

Boston,

Mass.

Via Fach. Otter.

Stati Uniti



BACK BAY ST
C

lightening our eyelids of their weight
as we moved on. At Rome I felt
Force decayed - a sad & tragic thing.
Here in Florence, as at Assisi and
Perugia, I feel Beauty, that can
never decay, being in its nature
eternal. Ah, our two weeks at
Assisi! The joy of wandering along
the hillsides, overlooking the wide,
fair Umbrian plain translucent
with the Springtime, - and ever
& again, in some forgotten mon-
tain chapel finding a faded
fresco so luminously lovely, so
full of grace & charm, that one
knew the ^{spirit of the} ~~opposite~~ landscape
had entered the very soul of the

Florence, May 11, 1902.

Dear Miss Whitney, if all the letters
I have written you in my mind had
really reached you, I fear that you
would have been quite snowed under.
How much we need a spiritual tele-
phone! For it is one thing to talk to a
friend in imagination often, eagerly
copiously, - and quite another to sit
down in cold blood and trace words
on paper. But I have a noble, and
much-cherished letter from you, in
answer to mine of last autumn,
- and now that my Florence is at
home, she gives me every word and
then inspiring glimpses of you - so
that you have never seemed far
away.

It was above all in Rome that I
used to talk to you so much. I never
passed the Via Sistina - and I passed
it often several times a day, - with-
out remembering how you and
Miss Manning lived there many
years ago, and trying to decide just
which house had harbored you.

The dear old Rome of your memo-
ries is sadly changed now. Fine
new quarters have sprung up, as Zola
describes them, the antiquities are
all ticketed and entered by a wicket,
the ruins are scraped of all verdure
till they look like brick factories
burned down last week, and the
new excavations are all most
dreadfully tidy. - But she is the Eter-
nal City still, and her mysterious

spell has not lost its power. I found
your statue - Roma, Roma, Ro-
ma! - often before my eyes as I
wandered among the old gardens
or sat in the Coliseum; and because
she haunted my vision while I
wrote a very ordinary sonnet, I
will copy the sonnet out for you. -
Our Roman months were very rich
in interests of all sorts.

Yet - shall I confess it? - I've
not left my heart there. It is here,
in Tuscany, in Umbria, in the
Italy of the middle ages. I can't
tell you what joyousness came
over me when we finally left her
and rolled northward - the centuries

American people, with all their sins and blunders, have a degree of moral soundness hardly to be found elsewhere. We have much to expiate; but I believe that God holds a great future for us yet. I am glad that ~~Dr.~~ Brent and my dear friend Margaret Waterman are going to the Philippines to keep in the Expiation.

I am to have another year of freedom from teaching, and I do hope that I can make it a year of productive work. My mind is fairly a-simmer with books I want to write. I wish I could stay over here - not travelling, and not surrounded with friends, but staying in one place quietly, without the inevitable

painter and been translated by him into angelic forms and saintly faces. That Umbrian & Tuscan art simply makes me laugh for joy. I can't express my delight in it. -

We are bound Northward now, for a long summer in the Alps. That will be good for Miss Dudley, and me, and all of us - better than more sight-seeing, I am sure. I have not been able to do much of any work of my own, with all the excitement of frequent change, both in scenes and companions, - and I am getting well enough now so that idleness makes me restless, and I would rather settle down to dream and write on a green mountain pasture than do any-

thing else in the world. I did manage
a series of articles for the "Atlantic"
during the winter. They are on our home
problems, - foreign policy I dared
not touch on, having nothing helpful
to say, - and feeling it useless to express
mere heart-sickness. Miss Dudley was
saying yesterday that you would be
glad ^{as we are} that the officers accused of ^{cruelty} ~~ty-~~
~~taning~~ in the Philippines are to be
court-martialed. I do not fear
that sensational wrongs like those
will continue, - but ah! the great
wrong that can not be undone! -
I have seen much this winter of a
young Finnish woman, earnest,
brilliant, interesting, on fire with
the terrible wrongs of her country -
the destruction by Russia of the Liber-

ties of Finland. There is nothing one
can say that can comfort her - but
I think she felt that I spoke truth
when I said that I would rather
belong like her to a nation oppressed
than like myself to a nation of op-
pressors. - But I did not mean to
touch on politics. I mean to forget
them as much as I can - except when
I say my prayers, - for they keep me
awake o' nights. And indeed, dear
Miss Whitney, one can't meet the
French or Italians and feel how
sore-heset are their countries, how
oppressed by many evils and con-
fronted by almost hopeless pro-
blems, without feeling that our own

distractions and interruptions of Boston
life: But I ought not to keep Mother
away from all her natural interests
much longer, and I think that the
Autumn will find us at home again.
And it will be a great joy to see
once more all the dear friendly faces
that will wait to welcome us.

I've not said one word about our
wonderful weeks in Sicily, - but how
even mention Sicily on a sheet? Some
day, you must let me tell you about
~~the~~ ^{it} the Greek temples fronting the
sunrise, the Greek theatres and for-
tresses and prisons, - the Saracenic
fragments in the old towns, - the
great Norman Churches, glorious
within with mosaics better preserved

and, & me, finer, than those of S. Mark's -
the orange & lemon groves carpeted
with golden blossom, - the iridescent
waters, - and crowning all the
slow-uprising majesty of snow-
crowned Aetna - It is a marvelous
land, but very desolate in its beauty,
a land of memories alone. I am
glad I have seen it; I do not want
to go again - And now I must
say goodbye, and end this dull
letter with love, or very much love,
to you and Miss Manning from
Mother and Helena and myself -

Yours - (and only yours)

David -

I'll put the little sonnet on
the next page -

Roman Anemories.

These glowing blossoms with their crimson sheen

Are memories of Rome imperial

Sighed by the Spring-in - Winter; like a pall

They stand the grave of greatness that hath been -

With these that mother-ghost, the ancient Queen

Of nations, she whose shade majestic

Broods o'er the ruins of her rise and fall

May deck her phantom crown of laurel green -

Yet press thy face within their velvet bloom:

Grets thee no hint of woodlands far away?

Pale blossoms of the stern New-England May

Requile within thy vision; mighty Rome

Fades, and eludes o'er thy senses, play

The shy perfume, the charm austere of home.